

STARK OPENING STATEMENT AT MARKUP OF HEALTH CARE REFORM LEGISLATION

Thursday, 16 July 2009

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WASHINGTON, D.C. & Representative Pete Stark (D-CA), Chairman of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, prepared the following opening remarks for today's markup of H.R. 3200, "America's Affordable Health Choices Act." The video is below:

"Thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you for yielding.

"You're right, today is an important day. We have a chance to provide affordable, quality health care to all Americans and bend the curve on escalating health care costs which are the top priority for consumers, businesses, and government. Our vote on this bill will be one of the most important votes that any of my colleagues will take in Congress.

"That said, the bill before us – America's Affordable Health Choices Act -- doesn't satisfy everyone.

"For progressives, it isn't single payer and gives the insurance industry far too much.

"For my friends on the right, it has the audacity to include a public health insurance option, and that doesn't move toward their goal of less government involvement.

"For those in marginal districts, there are tough provisions in this bill to vote for. We've saved more than \$500 billion out of the Medicare program – no health care providers is going to say thank you for reducing their pay. We've all heard complaints from nursing homes, health home agencies, wheelchair suppliers, and the list goes on.

"For those opposed to tax increases, they can simply say no because we do have a tax increase on the wealthiest Americans in this bill.

"Notwithstanding all of the perceived flaws, it is our duty as Members of Congress, I believe, to make the tough decisions presented to us. That's why we are elected.

"If I'd been given free rein, which the Chairman almost did, to write my own health reform bill, it would have looked different. But I am proud to be here today as one of many drafters.

"I think it would be difficult to go home and tell my constituents that I opposed health care reform because it would have caused millionaires to pay a little more in taxes, or because the nursing home industry told me to oppose it.

"This bill rises above special interests – and it supports the best interests of the all the American people.

"I look forward to the mark-up so we can get the bill to the President, and sign into law as soon as possible.

"I'd like to take just an extra second if I may, to thank our health staff who've been working, literally, around the clock. Cybele Byorkland, who you we'll hear from, Debbie Curtis, Chiquita Brooks-Lasure, Jennifer Friedman, Geoff Gerhardt, Dr. Tom Tsang, our Robert Wood Johnson fellow, Marci Harris, Drew Dawson, Ruth Brown, Drew Crouch, and Dan Elling from the Republican staff, and his helpers, who have been so patient with us. We've been unable to get all the information we'd like to get in a timely manner. Our excellent sub-committee interns Prarthna Desai and Julia Pockros, who is the daughter of one of our former staffers, have worked long hours as well. They're all to be thanked, because without them, we wouldn't have come this far.

"Thank you for yielding Mr. Chairman."

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